

VICTORIA ROAD
UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

1877 - 1977



Victoria Road United Reformed Church owes a great debt of gratitude to Andrew Smith and David Lawrence for undertaking the detailed research work, so that this history of the church could be written to celebrate its centenary, and also to Chris Webster for the sketch of the church which appears on the cover.

VICTORIA ROAD
UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
(formerly Victoria Road Congregational Church)

A HISTORY OF THE FIRST HUNDRED YEARS

by
Andrew Smith
and
David Lawrence

With forewords by: Mrs A. W. Sadler (nee Barradale); Mrs W. K. Armstrong;
the Rev. C. John Buckingham, M.A.; the Rev. John W. Green, M.A., M.ENG.;
the Rev. J. Lewis Wray, M.A.

'Where two or three have met together in my name, I am there among them'

Matthew 18: 20

The Rev. V. A. Barradale, M.A.
1929-1936

My father came to Victoria Road as minister in 1929. I think I am right in saying that we were the first family to occupy the manse at 41 Hurst Park Avenue (in the days when the old mill stood almost opposite to it). Of course I was away from home a lot of the time at College, etc., but I spent many happy holidays there and enjoyed many a picnic meal beneath the fruit trees at the bottom of the garden. When my father retired from the active ministry in 1936 he only moved just round the corner into Orchard Avenue, and for some years continued to take a lively interest in the work at Victoria Road, especially by serving on the Missionary Committee. Before becoming minister at Victoria Road he had been one of the foreign secretaries of what was then called the London Missionary Society, with special responsibility for the South Sea Islands. He and my mother had served as missionaries there when he was first ordained and it was due to ill health that he was forced to give up the work he loved so much, and return to this country. On two subsequent occasions he was sent on special missions to the South Sea Islands, travelling many miles on the missionary ship, *John William* IV. At the end of his last visit the captain and crew presented him with the ship's flag as a mark of their esteem and affection, and he in turn presented it to Victoria Road. It still hangs there, its stained and tattered condition bearing witness to all the storms the ship had weathered.

Of my father, as a minister, I can only say he was a real shepherd of his flock, faithfully preaching the word of God Sunday by Sunday and constantly and lovingly visiting all those who needed help. It was during his ministry that the Young People's Fellowship was formed, and my mother, with several of the ladies from the church, started the Women's Meeting - a most lively body. I had the pleasure of visiting it as a speaker years later, and always received such a warm welcome.

My sister and I were both married in Victoria Road Church, and the funeral services of my mother and father took place there. Is it any wonder that Victoria Road United Reformed Church will always hold a very special place in my heart?

A. W. Sadler
(nee Barradale)

The Rev. Norman Armstrong, B.A.
1937-1944

Norman and I arrived in Cambridge at the beginning of December 1937 and found a happy, friendly and helpful group of people, a real church, founded on the devotion and hard work of prior ministers, a thriving Sunday School under Mr Folkes' leadership, a well-attended Wednesday afternoon Women's Meeting, an enthusiastic L.M.S. group under Mrs Fromant's devoted leadership, and a choir which added greatly to the inspiration of the Sunday services.

During his years at Victoria Road, Norman threw his energy into all young people's work: the Scouts and the Youth Club (which was based on the Young People's Friendly, started by Mr Barradale), which broadened its activities. During the time that Norman was secretary of the Cambridgeshire Congregational Union, he sent out to each youth group in the county a list of questions of vital interest to young people at that time. Then a Day Conference was held each year at Emmanuel Church, when representatives from each youth group brought the results of their discussions on the questions, which proved very helpful both to themselves and to Norman. He also started the Pleasant Thursday Evening for both men and women, the only rule being that the members must be over twenty-five years of age. I understand the P.T.E. is still running. The L.M.S. Pilots were also launched in 1939 with the able help of the Collis family.

Norman also organised a holiday abroad for about thirty folk from the county in 1938. This was to have been an annual event but the war made any more trips impossible. In fact the war changed everything - young folk were called up, older folk joined Home Defence and Fire Fighting, evacuees poured in from London and the ladies did their best to house and feed the children separated from their parents. All our church activities had to be modified, but everyone did what they could to help. Norman and I found it difficult, owing to rationing, to do as much entertaining of the troops stationed around Cambridge as we would have wished, but we managed, thanks mainly to the sympathetic understanding of Mr Sidney Hart, who on occasions put an extra little bit of butter, tea or sugar into my shopping-basket.

Then came the invitation for my husband to become co-secretary of the Youth Department at headquarters in London, and after *very* careful consideration and prayer, he felt he was called to a wider sphere of youth work, which was very close to his heart.

We left 41 Hurst Park Avenue on June 5th 1944 and moved to our new home in Sanderstead on June 6th, "D Day". Ten days later the flying bombs started and many a time I wished myself back in beautiful Cambridge.

May God continue to bless the work of the Victoria Road U.R.C. and gives it members sympathetic understanding of the youth of today.

W. K. Armstrong

The Rev. C.J. Buckingham, M.A.
1944-1952

It began in 1877, but for me it began in 1944. There was a war on and it was the year of the Doodle-bugs. In the summer of that year I was introduced to Victoria Road and in the winter moved as a family from Co. Durham and I was inducted to the pastorate.

Although most of the evacuees had returned to their homes in London a few remained with our own numerous company of young people who were active in the life of the church. They held a regular, flourishing, and occasionally exhausting Sunday evening discussion group where rhetoric, or something like it, broke out every time.

Some sixty-five members or associates of the church were in H.M. Forces and many were still abroad, and a regular correspondence with them was maintained. But the war was slowly coming to an end and later we began to welcome home those whom we had long missed. I have before me as I write a copy of the printed programme of the second welcome-home supper, held on June 10th 1948 - 'Company Orders' included:

- 19.45 Full Parade for a Photograph
- 20.00 Assemble for Entertainment
- All Guards and Fatigues cancelled

The photograph shows a large company of the welcomed and the welcoming.

Gradually the routine of the church began to return to normal. One has a glorious technicolour patchwork of memories of the Sunday services and the special services, and the singing of "millions"; of Scouts and Cubs; of organisations for the young and for the not-so-young; of Badminton; of Country Dancing (they had an ignoble love for "The Parson's Farewell"); of the Women's Fellowship; of the Pleasant Thursday Evening; of the youngsters going to Cheshunt College for their Easter Conference, or joining the County churches in an annual Concert of Talents; of the sales and suppers; of the singing on Easter morning on Castle Hill; of the outings and of their aftermath in the showing of pictures of what went on in Clacton or Felixstowe or wherever. There must be extant some movies I have seen of our elders and betters (I must name no names) doing some very crazy cycling on bikes with elliptical wheels.

It all adds up to a lively fellowship intent, then as now, upon the Christian work and witness and enjoying it all immensely as it ought. Perhaps one cannot really speak of "Christianity for the fun of it", but if you take the fun out of it you cannot be doing it properly. Anyway, lasting friendships were made, all brilliantly illumined by our common Faith and Christian trust. Now new friendships are being made by a new generation in Victoria Road. May it continue for so long as God wills. And to Him be the glory, and the thanksgiving.

John Buckingham

*The Rev. John W. Green, M.A. M.ENG.,
1953-1960*

When we arrived in Cambridge in 1953 there was a feeling everywhere that the post-war years were over and things were brighter for everyone.

At Victoria Road one of the first important events to celebrate was the British and Foreign Bible Society's Triple Jubilee. This provided an opportunity for a pageant about the Bible, and enabled me to emphasise my concern about Bible study and prayer and to start a mid-week group that continued throughout my ministry.

I always felt that the church had been well blessed in my immediate ministerial predecessors, Norman Armstrong and John Buckingham, with their emphasis on Christian education and the Church as a family, and I gladly pressed forward in the direction they had chosen. In the following years we had several church discussions on the implications of Family Church. The morning congregation increased and became much larger than the evening one. On Sunday mornings the Services in church and the work in Junior Church followed various series of themes culminating in festival services four times a year (Christmas, Easter, Anniversary and Harvest). This was made possible by a competent, devoted and loyal Junior Church staff. I have the impression (though I may be wrong) that the number of children attending Junior Church and afternoon Sunday School was greater than for some years earlier or later.

The Sunday School Centenary in 1956 provided a great opportunity for celebration and acknowledgement of the work of devoted staff over the years. Many of us spent much time in planning and sorting out the history of the Sunday School, and probing memories, searching for pictures, press cuttings and so on. I celebrated afterwards with a month off, chiefly through exhaustion!

The choir and organist, always a faithful team, had their chance to shine when we adopted Congregational Praise at the beginning of 1957 (made possible by a bequest) and needed to be led in discovering new hymns and new tunes. Of course some church members preferred the old!

In 1953 the P.T.E. (an immortal group!) was already in existence and flourished alongside the Women's Meeting and the newly-formed Young Wives' Group. By 1955 it was felt that a Men's Fellowship would be a useful addition and this was started early in the year. Cambridge was a wonderful place for speakers, and this new open group thrived.

Many church members will remember the international flavour brought by various overseas visitors and students who came to the manse, some as friends and some to learn conversational English. Their visits to Junior Church, lesson and carol services, and so on, helped to some extent to set the life of the church in a world-wide context, whilst Week of Prayer services and a growing friendship with St Luke's Church emphasised our local inter-church relationships.

Our two church headaches were how to cope, on the one hand with ageing church buildings, and on the other with an increasingly vigorous

and noisy Youth Club with its predilection for unconventional garb, rock music, electronic guitars and powerful motor-bikes, and not all that much respect for the church or property. The former of these two headaches became a legacy to my successor; the latter we tried to sort out, with no great success.

We enjoyed our time at Victoria Road and in Cambridge as a family. Cambridge is a good place to live and grow up in. We made many friends inside and outside the church and were sorry to leave when the time came. Amidst all the ups and downs of church life, issues to decide, late-night meetings and the rest, there was also much joy in fun and fellowship, with parties and outings and spiritual enrichment, not forgetting the excitement of the first rocket to the moon to stand as a symbol beckoning us all to new and unexplored areas of God's Kingdom!

John W. Green

*The Rev. J. Lewis Wray, M.A.,
1961-1974*

Two of the strongest impressions made on me in the first month of my ministry were first the worshipful atmosphere of the Sunday services (the congregation joined fully in the worship and were good listeners to the sermons) and secondly the fact that it was clear the church's influence had strong and embracing roots in the life of the neighbourhood. Since the turn of the century there seemed to be very few people living in the Victoria Road district who had not been touched at some point or other by the church's ministry and witness. There are still some church members, though in the early 1960's there were many more, whose parents were members, who themselves had been baptised and grew up and married in the church and for whom in the best sense it was their spiritual home.

These two impressions were strengthened and confirmed in numerous ways in the 1960's. In January/February 1963 the Cambridge Evening News published a series of articles on the history and influence of different roads in Cambridge. On February 21st it was the turn of Victoria Road. The News quotes me as describing the church as "a good family church", and going on to say "Cambridge is a happy place in which to work. It is a place of lively interests and I think I can say that Victoria Road Church plays a full part in the life of the surrounding district."

In 1962, in common with most of the Congregational Churches, after discussion and some hesitation the afternoon Sunday School was transferred into the Sunday morning Junior Church. The church has been much blessed in a devoted group of leaders and officers for its various activities. It is true not only of the main church officers - secretary, treasurer and deacons (elders) - but also of a series of good youth leaders and a devoted band of Junior Church leaders and teachers, as also leaders of the weekday activities. The Women's Meeting was particularly strong and one of the largest in Cambridge. The Youth Group, as in most churches, tended to ebb and flow in numbers and enthusiasm but undoubtedly brought many young people into strong Christian influence.

The Women's Committee under the leadership of Mrs Key and later Mrs Neeves rendered splendid service and mention should be made of the sterling work of the late Mrs Fromant, both in the Women's Sewing Party and as an outstanding and indefatigable advocate of the wider missionary work of the church fellowship. There was also a determined effort at this period to encourage all members to give a proper and responsible place to the monthly church meeting.

Two highlighted landmarks stand out in the memory about these years - the first is the complete renovation and redecoration of the church buildings, interior and exterior. Inside the church a lowered false ceiling was installed and a completely new system of lighting and heating was introduced. The exterior structure was repaired and much improved and redecorated. The best feature of the whole scheme was the tasteful and worshipful redecoration

of the church interior. Such was the generosity of church members and friends that the whole sum of between £6000 and £7000 was raised within about six years from the scheme's inception. There were two committees to whom the main work of the scheme was entrusted. One was the Building-Fund Appeals Committee, the other the Fabric Restoration Committee. They worked very hard indeed and the church is much in debt to the skill of those two small committees, who laboured without reserve for love of the fellowship. The chairman of the Appeal Committee was Mr Samuel, the treasurer David Gatherum and the secretary Miss Margery Wilson. I think the members of the Fabric Committee would wish to say with one voice that the work evolved upon, and revolved around, one name - that of Mr Roger Stearman. He was responsible for advising about the structural improvements and was entirely responsible for the colour-scheme of the redecoration. He gave his talents and service with unqualified devotion and without stint. The church is still in his debt.

The other landmark of the mid-1960's was the Every Person Canvas. Many churches at the time were engaged in stewardship campaigns. The Congregational Church, advised by London headquarters, was asked to visit every home and family touched by the Church - not only church members but also members of the groups embraced by the church activities. The scheme was carried out with considerable effectiveness. The heart of the scheme was that volunteer church members should visit the 300 or so homes which the church touched in one way or another. Faint hearts said we would never get enough volunteers. In the event we had around 40 volunteers and they visited 6 to 8 homes each between them. In many cases it required no little courage for the shyer volunteers to visit the homes and take round the literature inviting people to various forms of service to the church and offering them the caring friendship of the church. The one who provided the initiative, the direction and the drive to the whole operation was Mr Sidney Neeves. It was one of his many valued services given during the 10 years he was church secretary. As secretary, Mr Neeves not only gave of his best in executive capacity and judgement but he was a friend to us all and served the church with great devotion.

The campaign stimulated and inspired the church in that a considerable number of new friends came into church membership. The church extended its range of friendship with the district and, not least, it proved a tool in revitalising many members' interest in the church worship and life.

It should be added that during this period the worship was supported by a loyal and faithful choir. To complete the record, Ian Constable contributed through the years a most valuable service as organist and choirmaster. He lived a fair way from the church, but Friday evenings and Sunday mornings and evenings he served it with great devotion. We were also fortunate to have in later years Mrs Custerson as an accomplished assistant. A very happy and close relationship developed between the church and our sister neighbour church of St Luke's.

There is a credit and debit side to church life as in all things. Not all is progress. There are shadows as well as prospects. Members continued to grow older in age and the church was not renewing its members in the younger age groups as fast as it was losing older members by death and removal. All churches today must live in hope of a fresh outpouring of the Spirit, a new baptism of faith and a return to church-going; the day of renewal will surely come. The recession of faith in the past has often been the prelude of a new dawn. It is for all church members to be faithful to their calling, until the day of reawakening faith in the gospel arrives once more.

As a last word let me say that no one can be associated with Victoria Road over the years without a growing awareness of the debt he or she owes to the Christian friendship of the church and the inspiring example of the deeply committed fellow-pilgrims on the journey to the heavenly city.

J. Lewis Wray

PREFACE

Only one excuse can be offered for a word from me in the opening pages of this booklet and this is a must. It was several months ago when the elders were planning the Centenary celebrations that they decided that a history of the church should be written.

I was not approached because I had any talent for writing up local church histories, for I have had little experience. I suppose it was due to my interest in Cambridgeshire Nonconformity since the days of Francis Holcroft, who himself for a while resided in Chesterton, and even back to the Lollards of the fifteenth century, who also were to be found in Chesterton. I agreed to the request to pen a narrative of the life and work at Victoria Road but later, when I came to start, was faced with a major problem, as all the official records, e.g. Deacons' and Church Meeting Minutes, had been deposited with the County Archivist and I was not free during the day to see them. In desperation, I sought someone who could help, and my good friend, Mr David Lawrence, B.A., a student at Westminster-Cheshunt College and Student Assistant at Emmanuel, readily agreed to come to my aid.

I hardly expected David to devote so much of his valuable time on my behalf but he has gone the extra mile, and the story you now read is his. We are all extremely grateful, none more than I, for his work in compiling a story which for its readers will be full of interest and recall many memories.

It was the late Dr A. J. Grieve, in his chairman's address who said: 'We shall better understand the problems of the present and fit ourselves for future, the more we know of the past, and of our own past.'

Andrew A. Smith

INTRODUCTION

It has been a great privilege to be allowed to write this history and a great challenge. I am aware that so much more could have been said but I think that within these pages the reader will find a worthwhile retelling of the story of 100 years at Victoria Road. Much of what I have written will already be known to many of those associated with the church, but I think, especially in those parts dealing with the early years, there will also be some surprises. I have quite consciously given more attention to the earlier part of the story than the later, for I do not think that I will be alone in finding that those pioneering years exercise a fascination greater than that of more recent events. I am more than indebted to Andrew Smith, despite his disclaimer, for his invaluable researches outside the actual records of the church; without his efforts this history would have been a much more limited affair. Finally I would like to take an opportunity to appeal to all concerned to ensure that the stuff of historical research, the magazines, newspaper articles and miscellaneous bits of paper that help to make a history come alive, are not neglected in the future. Sadly, this has often not been the case for the past hundred years. With very little effort, someone today could earn the undying gratitude of the writer of the church's next centenary booklet.

I hope that this history, limited as it is, will serve to remind many of the greatness of Victoria Road's past and to redouble their determination that that greatness will be a building block for the future.

Many happy returns, Victoria Road.

David Lawrence

Those who know something of the history of Victoria Road Church may perhaps wonder why we should be celebrating a centenary in this year of Our Lord 1977 when the present church had been preceded on its site by a Sunday School and preaching-station dating back to 1856. Interestingly enough, the church as we know it today did not spring directly out of that Sunday School, although the links were of the very closest from the beginning. The story of Victoria Road Congregational Church begins in earnest in 1875, to be precise on the evening of February 17th, and the birthplace was the vestry of Emmanuel Church. But having whetted our appetite we shall first cast an eye over the foregoing twenty years.

In 1856 New Chesterton was one of the growth-points of Cambridge. True, it was far from built up, but it was clear that the population of the area was destined to expand rapidly over the next few years. Among those to recognise the opportunity that was being presented was a group of members of what was then the Downing Place Church, later to become Emmanuel, and in 1856 they decided to rent two small rooms in Albert Street in order to run a Sabbath School. They began their school with twenty-five children, after visiting parents in the neighbouring cottages to obtain names, but so successful was the work that a mere two rooms was soon incapable of containing the growing numbers. A neighbouring barn was secured, but when it came to the collection of funds for the necessary alterations, so much support was forthcoming that in 1859 the school was able to move into a small, purpose-built, brick building,

The new building gave the opportunity to expand the work and it was decided to begin regular Sunday evening services, but this only met with limited success due to the difficulty of obtaining regular and suitable 'supplies' to preach there. The situation continued in a more or less unsatisfactory way for the next fourteen years, with the Sunday School thriving but little progress being made in terms of the preaching of the Word. In 1873, however, a group of university undergraduates, many of them associated with Emmanuel Church, decided to lend a hand with the preaching and events quickly took a new turn. They preached themselves and persuaded many of their friends to do the same. Purely by chance we have a first-hand account of the feelings of one young student, Arnold Thomas (later a notable Congregational minister) who was persuaded to take one Sunday evening service.

"I was asked to take a service one Sunday evening at a mission hall connected with the Congregational Church, then in Downing Street, and I felt it my duty to accept the invitation. Being a very shy youth, and especially in regard to all religious matters, the anticipation of making my first public appearance was not without its horrors. I remember lying on the bank of the river in the Trinity Walks on the May afternoon of the day fixed for the service, with an agony of apprehension in my mind, and am not sure that I did not feel tempted to slip into the sluggish stream and disappear finally from view. However, I braced myself as best I could for the tremendous task, and duly turned up at the appointed hour. If I

remember rightly, I had prepared a sermon which I supposed would be more or less appropriate for the congregation I expected to find awaiting me, but I have no recollection whatever of the text or the subject. I only know that that excellent sermon was never preached at that time or anywhere else; for I found, on arriving at the spot, that the congregation consisted of a few small children, who would most certainly not be able to make anything of my thoughtful little essay. I contented myself, therefore, with giving those youngsters a talk. What it was all about I am sure I cannot tell. From the sermon-class point of view it was probably the worst discourse that was ever delivered. I cannot recall a syllable of it, but, good, bad or indifferent, that was my first sermon."

Not everyone who preached had such a disheartening response and the work began to prosper as a result of the regular preaching. Very soon another problem had to be faced - neither the New Chesterton area nor its Sunday School were particularly wealthy, if anything quite the opposite, and without money further expansion of the buildings could not take place. More important, there were insufficient funds for the employment of a permanent preacher and without a permanent preacher the work would come to a halt. With a full-time worker, more vigorous evangelism could be undertaken, while local Nonconformists who were members of more distant churches would hardly be persuaded to break their previous links to associate with a fellowship where all they could expect to hear was an endless succession of inexperienced students.

So it was that on Wednesday February 17th 1875 the group of young enthusiasts who had done so much to get the preaching at Victoria Road off the ground brought their problem to a meeting called at Emmanuel for those interested in mission work in the New Chesterton area. One of the first actions of the meeting was to pass this motion: "That it is desirable to secure a home missionary to work and preach in New Chesterton under the direction of a committee", proposed by Mr Copping, a plumber, and a deacon of Emmanuel, and seconded by one of the students, a young man about whom we shall have a great deal more to hear, William Alfred Guttridge. Under the chairmanship of Dr Robertson, the minister of Emmanuel, a committee was elected to put the matter in hand. A glance down the lists of office-bearers of Victoria Road Church is sufficient to bear out the quality of that committee: Mr Tillyard, Mr Yockney, Mr Guttridge, Mr Scruby, Mr Hiddleston. A week later the actions of the meeting were "heartily approved" by a General Meeting of the church and congregation at Emmanuel. The discussions at that meeting served to highlight the separateness of the new initiative from the continuing work of the Sunday School; at one point a speaker felt moved to remind the meeting that a Sunday School existed at Victoria Road and that it should not be ignored. The meeting then called on the committee to begin the work of collecting subscriptions and of casting round for a suitable preacher. Events then moved quickly; on March 9th a meeting was held at Victoria Road to explain the work of the new committee and Dr Robertson spoke of the duties of members in the event of a church being formed: the

new initiative was given unanimous support. At a meeting of the committee on March 10th it was announced that subscriptions to the value of £100 3s 0d annually had been guaranteed for three years from among the membership of Emmanuel, enough to provide a stipend during the critical first years of the new church. (Those who hark back to the days when money was worth something and service was service will no doubt be intrigued to hear that at the same meeting it was resolved to ask the Gas Company to lay on gas to the schoolroom in Victoria Road by the following Sunday, it being Wednesday at the time. It was done – at a cost of £5.)

On Sunday March 14th a Mr Collie was invited to preach at Victoria Road with a view to taking up a ministry there, but after two Sundays the committee decided that he was 'not in every respect suited to work there'. Next in line came Mr Tidman Gill, at that time a student at the Lancashire Independent College in Manchester who was asked to preach in April and May. Gill preached to the committee and so impressed them that they warmly recommended him to the congregation. The congregation, however, did not share the committee's enthusiasm and at a meeting after the Sunday evening service at which Mr Gill preached, very few hands were raised in favour of him. The committee obviously resented having their warm recommendation made light of and brought the matter back to the congregation on the following Sunday. This time there were twenty-two in favour of Gill and eleven against: his name was finally dropped. The following Wednesday evening the committee extended its invitation to one of its own number, W. A. Guttridge, at that time a student at St John's College. Guttridge was already well known to the congregation and had recommended himself by his energy and earnestness on behalf of the mission. Although they had no reason to believe that he would be anything but wholeheartedly accepted, the committee obviously did not relish the chance of another favoured candidate being refused and there is no record that the congregation was ever formally consulted over the appointment of the man who was to be their first minister at the formation of the church. Son of the Rev. J. Guttridge, of the United Methodist Church, William Alfred Guttridge had been born at Rochdale on April 23rd 1853. He graduated from Manchester and from there came to St John's in Cambridge, becoming a member of Emmanuel Church in 1875. Since he was not to graduate from St John's until 1876, his friend Mr A. J. Tillyard, also of St John's College, agreed to supply the pulpit until February 1876.

The energetic work put into the new venture soon began to pay dividends and by the middle of 1875 the committee was engaged in urgent discussions as to the possibility of erecting a temporary building to replace the present inadequate premises. An estimate for a temporary wooden building to hold 200 was obtained, the figure being £110, and it was agreed to go ahead if promises of subscriptions for two thirds of the amount could be obtained. By October it was revealed to a committee meeting that less than £60 had been subscribed, but the problem was solved when, on the spot, subscriptions

were offered by Mr Bond of £5, Mr Collin of £5, Mr Yockney of £5 and Mr Whibley of £10 – no small amounts at the time. On April 23rd 1876 the opening of the new wooden building was celebrated but it was by no means all plain sailing. The amount of money needed to get the mission off the ground was a constant cause for concern. The new pastor was guaranteed a stipend of £150 a year plus £30 expenses, well above the £100 a year that had originally been subscribed. To the £110 that it had cost to erect the wooden chapel had to be added the cost of furniture and fittings. At a committee meeting in May 1876 bills to a total of £310 were presented. There was no question of an appeal to members since a mission, as opposed to a church, *has* no members and it was only due to self-sacrifice on the part of members of the committee and the good will of some of the more prosperous members of Emmanuel Church that the venture was able to keep its head above water.

At the same time the work itself was going well with high attendances, especially at the evening services – so many people, indeed, that it was often necessary to place seats in the aisles of the 200-seat building. By the middle of 1876 the question of forming a church was under active discussion and it was decided that for the moment all that would be done would be to institute a regular Communion service. Those who were known to be members of other churches would be permitted to take Communion without further ado, others would be issued with a Communion 'ticket' by Mr Guttridge on the basis of regular attendance. In early 1877, despite continuing pressure on finances, the committee decided to release those members of Emmanuel who had given pledges to the mission's funds. The idea was to test the powers of the congregation to raise the money necessary for the continuance of the work: if the congregation showed itself able to accept the burden, then nothing stood in the way of the formation of a church. The committee passed this motion: "That this committee, receiving with much satisfaction the progress of the cause and hearing from Mr Guttridge of the feeling evinced by many of the people for the formulation of a church, beg to express their opinion of its desirability and heartily wish them God speed."

It was the end of one era and the beginning of another: the days of Sunday School and preaching-station manned by committed members of Emmanuel were drawing to a close and the Christian witness that had begun twenty years ago in Albert Street was preparing to go its own way. On March 29th 1877 the first church meeting took place and its first business was to draw and sign the covenant which was to be the basis of the new church:

"In harmony generally with the principles of Church Order and Discipline held by Congregational and Independent Churches – and, as they believe, in accordance with the teaching of the word of God – the following persons do most solemnly unite together to form a Christian church to be called 'Victoria Road Congregational Church'. They do this on the basis of common union with Christ as their Saviour and mutual confidence in one another as His followers. They also enter this bond in humble dependence

for the supply of all their need upon the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Universal Church."

Beneath were added sixty-three names and to a background of greetings from Emmanuel, a new church was born.

If William Guttridge had been appointed in 1875 without consultation with the congregation, the church meeting quickly made up for the omission by inviting him to become their first minister, an invitation which he not surprisingly accepted, although he was not to be formally ordained until the anniversary service at the beginning of April. At a cost of 10s a year the church decided to subscribe to the Congregational Union.

The acid test of a church, however, is not its beginning but the work of God that it continues. Here again the early years of Victoria Road showed every sign both of man's determination and God's blessing. In addition to the regular Sunday worship, morning and evening, and the Sunday School, the earliest years saw the institution of cottage meetings, bible classes, adult schools and a boys' night school. Within less than a year of the formation of the church the pressure of numbers was so great that a building committee was formed with a view to erecting a larger, permanent building. Fund-raising was to go on for a number of years and was to strengthen the links between Victoria Road and Emmanuel in two ways, one of them likely and one less so. Firstly it is characteristic of the generosity of Emmanuel shown to the young church in its early years that they should offer a large part of the proceeds from the sale of their previous site in Downing Place to the building-fund. The tie was inadvertently made closer by the Charity Commissioners, who refused to sanction the transfer of funds on the grounds that the trust deed of the Downing Street Chapel limited the use of the funds "for the Rev. Joseph Hussey, his congregation and their successors for the worship of God". At the suggestion of the Commissioners this description was written into the trust deeds of Victoria Road Church which stands, legally, alongside Emmanuel as the direct descendant of the great meeting which was formed in 1687.

By early 1884 nearly £3000 had been raised and on May 20th 700 people crowded into the Guildhall for a tea held to celebrate the laying of the foundation-stone by William Fowler, M.P. The architect of the new building was Lewis Banks, its builders Willmott and Sons, and when, 10 months later, on Tuesday March 10th 1885, the first services were held in the new building, the total cost had been £3800, of which the church had already raised £3300. About the same time as the completion of the new building a change in the relationship between the church and Sunday School was made. In 1879 Emmanuel had officially relinquished its oversight of the school and although its ties with the new church were obviously of the closest, the school continued an independent existence for some years. Now, however, it petitioned the Church Meeting to become 'vitaly and organically' connected with the church and to be considered one of the church's sub-committees. Bearing in mind the ever-present problem of Sunday School everywhere, which is to

ensure that the older scholars when they outgrow the school remain committed Christians and express their commitment by joining a Christian fellowship, the church readily approved the idea.

A characteristic of the church from its early years was a healthy lack of satisfaction with its own efforts. Growth in numbers went hand-in-hand with a constant reappraisal of what was being done and a constant desire to expand the work, mainly through evangelistic weeks and leafletting of the local community. Nor were standards of devotion to be allowed to fall – in 1881 it was decided that any member absent from the Lord's Table for six months in succession without good reason would automatically be removed from the roll of membership. The advent of the new building appears to have spurred the church on to redouble its efforts in the neighbourhood. A Uniform Mission Band was set up and was highly successful. Prayer meetings were held on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday evenings. Each Saturday members of the congregation distributed evangelical tracts and late in 1886 1000 copies of an almanac giving the times of services were distributed in the neighbourhood. Such drive was richly rewarded; in 1886 60 people were added to the church rolls and after only 10 years of existence the membership had grown from 63 to 210. In 1886 Victoria Road Church was already bigger than its parent church, in fact the biggest Congregational Church in Cambridgeshire.

In gratitude to the man who had done so much to help create their church and whose labours had been blessed with such success, the church presented the Rev. Guttridge with a purse containing nearly £70, "spontaneously raised in loving recognition of the deep obligations under which Mr Guttridge has laid his people during the 12 years of his mission among them". But his efforts were taking their toll on his health and in 1889, after a convalescence of several weeks in Devon, he announced that he was unable to carry on full-time pastoral work due to his ill-health. 1889/90 was the first and last time that the church was ever to run to the luxury of an assistant minister, when Clifton Somervell, a King's College student who graduated in 1888, came to take some of the burden while Guttridge continued his convalescence. Guttridge's continued illness obviously depressed him and in April he offered his resignation, saying "recently I have come to feel that the church as a whole has not given me the support that it did in former days". To show that he was wrong the Church Meeting not only unanimously asked him to reconsider his position, but also arranged a ballot of the whole membership which showed an overwhelming majority in favour of him staying. Faced with this proof of the loyalty of the congregation the minister withdrew his resignation. Certainly the state of the church did not reflect any lack of health or enthusiasm, for at the anniversary celebrations of 1891 it was announced that membership had reached 270. But still William Guttridge continued to feel that it was time for him to leave the church that he had helped to build and in September 1891 he again tendered his resignation. He had, he said, given his message over the sixteen years of his association with the work at Victoria Road and found preaching an increasing burden; he still felt that

there was a lack of enthusiasm for his ministry on the part of a few. Most of all, never having been a man to give anything less than the full attention and effort that the job demanded, he desired to move to something less strenuous. Reluctantly the church accepted his resignation.

With his departure the church entered a new phase of its life. William Alfred Guttridge had helped to pilot the work at Victoria Road from the days when it had been a struggling preaching-station, always unsure whether regular preachers could be obtained, to a flourishing church of 270 members in a fine new building. He had gathered around him not only local residents but university men by the quality of his preaching and his ministry is unique in the history of the church. Not surprisingly the church was reluctant to see him go. Even when they had accepted his decision they pressed him to accept his stipend after the end of the year, when his resignation became effective, but he refused. As a parting gift the church presented him with the gift of a library table and £70 in cash. Nor did they forget him when he took up his ministry at Zion Church, Attercliffe, Sheffield, for when, two years later, a lock-out of miners caused much hardship, the church raised a special collection which they sent to their ex-minister to distribute as he saw fit. He was to spend most of the rest of his life in Sheffield in one capacity or another and it was in Sheffield that he died in 1930 at the age of seventy-seven, a few days after the fifty-third anniversary of his first church.

With his departure the church left behind the major reminder of its recent origin and became, in the eyes of the world, one more fellowship seeking God's will for its ministry; childhood had been left behind.

The church did not have long to wait for its new minister and in September 1892, after hearing seven different candidates over the previous nine months (how many churches today would get that amount of choice?), the ministry of John Eames began at Victoria Road. He had come from Sittingbourne, where he had a short pastorate of only two years, after completing his studies at Christ's College, Cambridge and New College, London. He was to be minister at Victoria Road for six years and although few records exist for that period, it does not seem to have been a time of great change in any direction; perhaps it was the period of consolidation that was needed after the rapid growth and building of the early years. We can, though, note in passing an event of some significance in the life of the church in September 1892, apart from the arrival of its new minister, and that was the departure for China of Dr and Mrs S. Lavington-Hart. Alongside a distinguished academic career in Cambridge Dr Lavington-Hart gave a great deal of time to local preaching, Sunday classes for working men and boys' clubs. In 1902 he was to establish the Tientsin Anglo-Chinese College and to earn a lasting place in the history of the universal Church as one of the greatest of the educational missionaries to China. Throughout his career the church continued to take a close interest in both him and his work and no small amount of money over years was sent from Cambridge to China.

In August 1898, John Eames left Victoria Road for the ministry of Eccleston Square Church in Belgravia. The commencement of Victoria Road's next ministry, that of Sidney Milledge, was marked by controversy. The first vote given in favour of him showed eighty-eight persons in favour and twenty-six against. A meeting of church and congregation later voted by only sixty-four to thirty-six while the final church meeting which issued the call gave him a majority of eighty-three to thirty-six. These are not the figures that we would normally expect to see associated with the issue of a call to a minister, but they must not be seen as a reflection on the character and abilities of Sidney Milledge. The dispute was, rather, over an issue which was more than once to raise problems in relation to the ministry of the church, that of ministers taking advantage of the presence of the university to advance their own studies. Luckily for the church the issue was solved, for although Sidney Milledge's ministry was only a matter of five years it turned out to be a period of drive and enthusiasm. He had been born in Holloway in 1862 and trained at Cheshunt College, though before that he had conducted a great deal of youth work in the Catford district of London, having a great deal of influence over many young people who were later to go on to become ministers and social workers. The first problem to be tackled was that of the inadequate premises available to the Sunday School and in October 1899 the foundation-stone was laid for a new and bigger Sunday School building to cost nearly £1500, the project being completed in March 1900. Reflecting its new pastor's enthusiasm for youth work, the church appears to have extended its work among the young people of the area and the records contain a refreshing number of references to the large number of 'new Christians' who were offering themselves for membership. In 1901 a special missionary effort resulted in thirty young converts at one time! Once again, however, the heavy demands of the ministry at Victoria Road began to prove too much for the health of its minister and in April 1904 Sidney Milledge felt constrained to offer his resignation in favour of a less strenuous ministry at Caterham, where true to his earlier interests he is said to have exercised great influence over the boys of the school. He died in Axminster after fifty years in the ministry. His story, insofar as his connection with Victoria Road is concerned, had a fairy-tale ending, for shortly after leaving he married one Miss Collin who had been among the congregation at Victoria Road until her departure from Cambridge in 1902.

Within a few months the church approved by eighty votes to nil the candidacy of Bertram Jesse Harsum Taylor, who came to Victoria Road directly from New College, London, where he had been Senior Student. His ministry at Victoria Road appears to have been uneventful, though that is not to say unfruitful. His period left a permanent legacy in the form of a new organ which survives to this day. Built by Miller and Son of Cambridge in 1905 it was officially opened by H. J. Warmington, then organist of Emmanuel, on January 11th 1906, the total cost being the considerable sum of £434. During Taylor's ministry the church also began to assume

more of the responsibilities of an established fellowship. When in 1889 Castle End Mission had asked Victoria Road to take over responsibility for its work on the retirement of Mrs Whibley, a Victoria Road member, the church had felt constrained to answer no. By 1909, however, Victoria Road was supplying preachers to Kingston Congregational Church and had agreed to supply Little Shelford during vacations when students from Cheshunt College were not available (later it was agreed to take overall responsibility for the work at Little Shelford). These years were notable, too, for the distinction conferred on a church member, Mr H. G. Whibley, who was elected Mayor of Cambridge in 1908. B. J. H. Taylor left in 1910 for a pastorate in Leamington Spa. In later years he and his family were to emigrate to South Africa, where he was to become minister of Musgrave Road Congregational Church, Durban. In South Africa he exercised an influential ministry over a period of thirty-two years, in 1945 being chosen as the first chairman of the Congregational Union of South Africa. He died in 1968 at the age of ninety-two.

When Taylor left in 1910 the choice of the church fell on John Bevan (who interestingly enough was the son of the Rev. L.I. Bevan who had preached the first sermon in the new church building back in 1885.) One of his first actions on arriving was to enrol as a student at Jesus College, leading to a degree in 1914. Bevan's years at Victoria Road were to be dominated by the First World War, which brought disruption in many ways. At one time or another all the outbuildings were occupied by the military and it was only by dint of continued pressure that the church was allowed access to them for a limited period on Sundays. Mid-week services had to be cancelled owing to the strict lighting regulations although later in the war this was overcome by means of darkening out the windows – no small task. For a time the church was deprived of its pastor when in March 1915 John Bevan announced that he had applied for, and been granted, a post as forces' chaplain. Despite the difficulty of the times the church not only agreed to grant its minister a temporary release but also decided to make up the difference between a chaplain's pay and the stipend he was accustomed to receive from the church. As fate would have it, John Bevan was not to be separated from his congregation for very long. In December the church received news that he had reached Gallipoli but had contracted dysentery – by April 1916 he had been invalided home. Most tragic of all the difficulties raised by the war was the loss of a generation of young men. The records of meeting after meeting are dominated by news of yet another friend whose life had been laid down; yet another family to whom the church must offer its condolences. It would not be surprising to hear that such a tragic period led to a strengthening of bonds, not only within individual fellowships but between Christians of all denominations. The first mention of what we know today as the ecumenical movement comes in this period when, in 1916, the minister attended a conference held at Westminster College where a resolution was passed calling for a union of the Free Churches. The war years see, too, the first mention of

next-door neighbours St Luke's; in September 1916 the church sent a goodwill message to the Rev. Frank Hird who was leaving Cambridge as a result of illness. By 1918 the links had grown sufficiently to allow a joint service to be held and accounted a great success.

But by 1918 the ministry of the church had again changed hands. When John Bevan had returned from Gallipoli he had been succeeded as chaplain there by the Rev. Frank Ballard. Now, a year later, when Bevan accepted a call to Soho Hill in Birmingham, Frank Ballard once again succeeded him. He also followed John Bevan in enrolling at the university on arrival. He proved to be a popular minister but his stay was not to be a long one; in 1921, shortly after receiving his degree in Theology, he left for Highbury Church, Bristol.

February 1922 saw the induction of Roderic Dunkerley to the pastorate. Son of the famous author John Oxenham, Roderic Dunkerley had been born in London in 1884. He trained at New College, London and went on from there to minister for thirteen years in Colchester. Despite his later very distinguished career it must be admitted that his association with Victoria Road was not an entirely happy one. Numbers began to decline and the first hint of strained relations is found in 1925 when the Moderator was called in to act as a mediator in the "ministerial problem". In 1926, the fall in membership having continued, a special meeting was held during the minister's holidays and on his return Dunkerley issued a statement saying that he would willingly accept a call elsewhere if one should come. On their part, the deacons made it clear that the church would not wish him to accept a call to anywhere he might be less than happy. Shortly after having the degree of Doctor of Philosophy conferred on him in December 1927, Dr Dunkerley left for the pastorate of Southgate, Gloucestershire. From there he became Principal of Westhill Training College in Birmingham and later had two further pastorates at Hockley and Kelvedon. He died in 1966. He was the author of many books, perhaps the most successful being the Penguin *Beyond the Gospels*, which has been reprinted.

There are few churches which have not been through a difficult period such as that experienced by Victoria Road in the 1920s. Being situated where it was, there were always the seeds of a conflict between the type of minister required by the New Chesterton area and the type of minister attracted to Cambridge by the prospect of furthering his studies at the University. It is a tribute to the church and to its minister that in this case they were able to honestly admit their incompatibility and to handle it in a way worthy of a Christian fellowship.

But if the church had been through an unhappy experience, it was to be extremely fortunate in its next choice of minister. Geographically it did not have to look far, for in March 1929 a special meeting was convened to consider the question of a call to Victor Arnold Barradale, at that time minister of Howard Chapel, Bedford. He came to Victoria Road with an impressive lifetime of experience behind him. Born in 1874 of L.M.S. missionary

parents in Tientsin, China, he had come to live, at the age of five, with his uncle the Rev. George Sadler in Derbyshire, following the death of his parents. He gained a scholarship to Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and from there went to Mansfield College, Oxford, for training as a missionary. In 1899 he was appointed by the London Missionary Society to serve in Samoa but was able to stay only five years because of his wife's health. On returning home he became minister of Congregational churches, first at Cuckfield, then at Howard Chapel. Whilst in Bedford he again visited Samoa, in the capacity of chairman of the Southern Committee of the L.M.S. In 1925 he took up a post as one of the foreign secretaries of the L.M.S. He was fifty-five when he came to Victoria Road and was to be one of the church's most beloved pastors. It was the commencement of the Rev. Barradale's ministry which saw the purchase of the present manse for his use, on what was then the new Hurst Park Estate. He brought with him not only his own undoubted talents but the deep love and respect of his previous congregation, who for several years to come were to engage in various fund-raising activities to help Victoria Road pay off the considerable mortgage on the new manse. The years of Barradale's ministry at Victoria Road, covering as they did some of the worst years of the Depression, cannot have been easy for a church in a far-from-wealthy area such as New Chesterton, but under his guidance the church appears to have continued its work without major setback, even growing a little after the sharp fall in numbers during the 1920s. It was time for only small changes, like the decision to open the church every day for private prayer and rest, like the installation of an accouticon for the benefit of the hard of hearing (at the expense of Mrs W. Lilley), like the adoption of the Wayside Pulpit scheme. It was a time, too, of a certain sadness, for the church's first two ministers died during these years, William Guttridge on April 16th 1930 and John Eames on February 24th 1934.

In July 1936, Barradale, to the immense regret of the church, announced that due to his advancing years he felt unable to continue as full-time pastor. The church asked him to reconsider his decision but he was adamant. It was not to be the end of his association with the church, however, for intending to accept no further calls from churches he desired to remain in the Cambridge area. For some time he continued to live rent-free in the manse. In December, five months after his resignation, he presented the church with a bound volume of church magazines covering the period 1915-1936, a volume which today is lodged with the County Records Office. In the following January the church elected him to the position of delegate to the national and county Congregational Union. When they later discovered that, as a minister, he was an *ex-officio* member, the church meeting decided that it would elect Mrs Barradale in order that they might attend together. In March their ex-minister was elected to the Missionary Committee. The church was obviously loathe to surrender the services of so beloved a pastor. In later years, though he had intended to retire completely, he willingly took over the temporary pastorate of Royston whilst their own minister was serving as a

chaplain in the Army. He died on October 12th 1947, at the age of seventy-three.

From the time of Victor Barradale's resignation it was almost eighteen months before the church was again to have a full-time pastor. In December 1937 Norman Armstrong took up the ministry of Victoria Road after a period at Wisbech. No sooner had he settled into his work than the record books of the church were punctuated by a fateful sentence announcing the declaration of war on Germany. Once again the life of the church was to be dominated by the needs of war for several years. On weekdays the Sunday School premises were in use as a nursery and as a rest centre for the use of evacuee members. Indeed, so great was the pressure on the church's premises that a request for their use by the Home Guard had to be turned down. During their stay in the neighbourhood many of the evacuee children took the opportunity to attend Sunday School; there were, in fact, so many children that it was decided to hold special children's services. The church also responded generously to the many national appeals for funds to help in the rebuilding of churches destroyed as a result of enemy bombing and for the support of the ministers of many of those churches. Much appreciated work was done in terms of the regular parcels sent to those members who were serving in the forces; the first Christmas parcel in 1940 consisted of one cake, some cigarettes, one pair of half hose, some sweets and an inspirational book. Once again the normal pattern of services was disrupted by the need to observe the blackout regulations and there were cases of meetings having to be adjourned as a result of air-raid warnings. A change of enduring effect, though not really occurring as a result of the war, took place in 1941 when, after a long consultation with other churches who had adopted the scheme, the morning Sunday School decided to develop along the lines of a Junior Church, following a national trend in Congregational churches.

In March 1944 Norman Armstrong resigned the pastorate of the church. He had guided the church through the war years without loss of membership, in fact at 206, the membership in 1943 was exactly the same as in 1938; now he left to become the co-secretary of the Youth Department of the Congregational Union of England and Wales. He was later to have pastorates in in Preston and Lancaster and he died on October 25th 1975.

Less than four months later the church called a new minister who was in later years to go on to become one of the most distinguished in its history, C. John Buckingham. He was minister at a difficult time. It was not until 1946 that the church regained the full use of its premises, and even when this had been done post-war shortages meant that an application for a licence to redecorate them was turned down for some time until, in 1948, permission was given for a limited redecoration. Fuel shortages led to worries about the continued use of the church's coke boiler, but when a plan was brought forward for conversion to gas permission was again refused for the work to go ahead. One financial burden was lifted in 1949, however, when the last instalment was paid on the manse. It was, too, unfortunately a period of some

decline in membership, a decline that continued in the 1950s, membership figures for the first time since the early years dipping below the 200 mark. In 1952 C. John Buckingham was chosen as the new moderator of the Eastern Province and so resigned his pastorate at Victoria Road. He was to go on, in 1972, to be the last president of the Congregational Church in England and Wales before the formation of the United Reformed Church. His last pastorate was at Southwold and from there he retired to live once again in Cambridgeshire.

He was succeeded by John William Green in 1953. Green had in fact trained in Cambridge at Cheshunt College before going to Stockport for his first pastorate from 1948 to 1952. The later years of his ministry at the church were dominated by the necessity to raise enough money to permit a major renovation of the church. In 1957 an appeal was launched to raise £3000 for the necessary work. It was also a time marked by close links with the church at Duxford when Mr Gandy (who held no less than five posts within the church) left in 1955 to become the part-time minister there. The church was later to give the Duxford fellowship a gift of hymn-books and a piano for work there. Particularly close links were maintained with the work of Cheshunt College over these years, with Cheshunt students conducting mid-week services. One reason for the maintenance of good relations was the fact that in 1959 the Rev. and Mrs Pyle became members of the church – he was to become Principal of Cheshunt college. The Rev. Pyle's talents were employed during one of the less happy episodes of the period when he was called upon by the church to investigate its youth activities, an aspect of the work of the church which was to cause continuing concern over the next few years.

At the church meeting held on May 30th 1960 the church heard good news and bad. The renovation fund had reached two-thirds of its intended target at £2000; the church had been bequeathed £1600 by Miss F. Nunn; John Green announced his intention to leave for Durham. In later years he was to move from Durham to the church at Great Malvern where, in a church partially cut into the side of the Malvern Hills, he continues his ministry at the time of Victoria Road's centenary. He was to be followed at Victoria Road by James Lewis Wray in 1961, a ministry which was surpassed in length only by the church's founding minister. Against the trend in many churches it was to be a period of notable activity and stability of membership. It began with a need for major renovation, but activity was by no means limited to fund-raising. Twice during the 1960s the church had the pleasure of participating in an exchange of ministers with a church in Florida, the American minister, Dr Greene, being present at Victoria Road for two months in 1964 and for a longer period in 1968. It proved to be a popular arrangement, but sadly Dr Greene died shortly after his final return to his home church. Work among the very young took on its present-day form when, in 1962, the Junior Church and Sunday School merged to form a Family Church. Slightly further up the age scale, although there were continuing problems

with youth work, an encouraging number of young people joined the church in most years as a result of membership classes taken by the minister. In fact the membership of the church as a whole remained remarkably stable over the whole of these years, with roughly the same number of members on the roll at the end of 1975 as there had been in 1961, a record which a great many churches would have been glad to emulate. This fight against the trend was not achieved without effort; in 1965 a major every person canvas resulted in ten new applications for membership at one time, which may seem a small number but represented a 6% increase in the membership over the period of a few months. In 1965 a preaching group was formed and did valued work in the smaller churches around Cambridge. Joint work with the sister church of St Luke's was stepped up to new levels, with co-operation on youth work and regular joint services being instituted; the first of these in January 1966 was reckoned a great success, with nearly 200 people attending the social after the service. The most important change, in ecumenical terms, however, came in 1971 when the church decided in favour of the union of the Congregational Church in England and Wales and the Presbyterian Church of England and followed up its decision by entering the United Reformed Church. In 1974 Lewis Wray retired from the ministry. He had succeeded as a minister during a period of great difficulties for other churches. Despite continuing burdens of renovation which would have crippled many churches, Victoria Road had continued its work and maintained its strength. After his retirement Lewis Wray became Interim Moderator of the church at Duxford. He still lives in the Cambridge area.

In 1975 the church called Brian Thomas Sturtridge to its ministry. In him they have found an enthusiasm, both for the welfare of Victoria Road and for the role of that fellowship in the wider church, that would be hard to match. The history of his ministry will fall to the writer of Victoria Road's next centenary booklet, but if drive is any indication his ministry will have no small part to play in the progress of the church.

It is difficult to write an ending for a continuing story such as this. The past of the church which began 100 years ago in New Chesterton has held great things and there is no reason why the future should not hold greater. Through times of overwhelming success and times of struggle the Gospel of Christ has been preached and heard by countless numbers as a result of that 100 years. I can think of no better way to end than with the words of J. Lewis Wray in his final letter to the church before his retirement:

"At the end of my ministry I am more than ever convinced that our Christian faith is the one sufficient answer wherewith to meet the hunger of human hearts for God's word of life and peace. It may be true that our faith needs to be presented in thought-forms which modern people understand, but the faith of God's availing and prevailing love and grace remains the same. We must take care to cherish the faith, lest we allow it to be dissolved in the acids of modernity. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. It may be necessary to find new ways of presenting Jesus to the people, perhaps in song, dance and drama, but we must hold

fast to the central truth of our faith that in the gift of Jesus Christ to His world, God has come to meet us and redeem us to Himself through the outpoured ministry of teaching, healing and compassionate service in 1st century Palestine and in the outpoured life of forgiving, victorious love at Calvary, outside Jerusalem's city wall. In the birth, life, death and glorious rising again of Jesus of Nazareth, God has spoken to all men for all time. Amidst so much uncertainty today, it is of primary importance that all believing Christians should hold firm to the central and life-changing gospel of our faith.

The second thing the ministry has taught me is the continuing importance in the life of society of the *local gathered fellowship of the church*. It may be true that we need many fewer churches in some areas and that we need to find new ways of presenting our worship, witness and service, but the local unit, the local cell, the local church still has a vitalising, cleansing and leavening part to play in the life of the community. It may be true that industrialised society needs specialised forms of ministry, but I am clear that there is a continuing and completely necessary place for the local gathered fellowship – the people of Christ (people, officers and ministers together) in the midst of each community where people live, eat and work and play. There will always be a place for the worship, witness, service and missionary outreach of the local church.

Now looking forward – I have no doubt whatsoever that revival will come, that a great outpouring of God's Holy Spirit will come upon our churches and the people of our land. There are signs already that this is beginning to take place (especially among the more thoughtful younger people). We must be ready. This is true for all branches and gathered fellowships of Christ's Church.

It is to our church here in Victoria Road, that I particularly remind you, that, if what I have written in the foregoing is true, it is of the highest importance that every member of our church should be faithful and loyal in his or her churchmanship. Our church has a great past. In times of indifference it is (like most churches) passing through a difficult and testing time. I see no reason whatever to doubt that the best time for our church is yet to come. The one condition is that we should be found fruitful in attendance, in support, in prayer and in love. If we truly love our Lord Jesus Christ we shall continue to show our love for His Church."

FORMER MINISTERS OF VICTORIA ROAD

GUTTRIDGE, William Alfred, M.A.

Son of the Rev. J. Guttridge, of the United Methodist Church, he was born at Rochdale, April 23rd 1853. He graduated at Manchester and then came to St John's College, Cambridge where he graduated in 1877, having become a member of Emmanuel Congregational Church in 1875. Before "going down" he was invited to become minister of the newly-formed Congregational Church in Victoria Road, where, according to the obituary notice in the Congregational Year Book "he did pioneer work of the finest kind, gathering round him University men as well as residents in the district, and exercising a unique ministry". From Cambridge he removed to Attercliffe, Sheffield, where he remained thirteen years. Though intending to retire, he undertook the pastorate of Cemetery Road, Sheffield from 1921 to 1924 and took a very active interest in the local Free Church Federal Council, the L.M.S. and also the League of Nations Union. He died in Sheffield April 16th 1930.

SOMERVELL, Clifton, M.A.

He was born at Clifton, Bristol in 1857 and went to school at Southport. He was a student at King's College, Cambridge, graduating B.A. in 1888. That year, he became assistant to the Rev. W. A. Guttridge but only for approximately twelve months as he felt the "call" for full responsibility and then became minister at Rainhill. Here he stayed seven years, moving to Park Hill, Nottingham (1898-1912) thence to Hessele (1912-1923) where regrettably he had a break-down in health, compelling him to resign. He died in 1938.

EAMES, John, M.A., A.T.S.

As successor to the Rev. W. A. Guttridge, the church invited John Eames to become minister. He had come from Sittingbourne where he had had a short pastorate of only two years, after completing his studies at Christ's College, Cambridge and New College, London. His stay in Cambridge as minister of Victoria Road was only six years, after which he moved to Pimlico, and later to Lewisham where he retired in 1918. But this was not to be a complete retirement for he was the secretary of the Kent County Union from 1913 to 1930. He died at Loughton in 1934 at the age of seventy.

MILLEDGE, Sidney, A.T.S.

Born at Holloway in 1862, Sidney Milledge was trained at Cheshunt College though before that had conducted some important youth work in the Catford district. There he initiated work among boys and had a great influence on many who became ministers or church and social workers. He settled at Broadstairs in 1894, moving to Kelvedon two years later. He became minister of Victoria Road in 1899 and remained five years, subsequently moving to Caterham where he had a great influence over the boys of the school. Here he also became a chaplain to the Guards Barracks. Subsequent pastorates were at Bath, Cavendish and finally Raymonds Hill, Axminster, where he died in 1946. His name will be associated with the L.M.S. for his brother Percy served for many years in Madagascar and his nephew Dr Geoffrey Milledge in China (1929-1950) and later in India.

TAYLOR, Bertram Jesse Harsum, M.A., B.D.

Born 1876, and trained at New College, London, Bertram Taylor's first pastorate was at Victoria Road, to which he was invited in 1904. In 1910 he removed to Leamington Spa, where alongside his pastoral duties he was secretary of the Leamington District. In 1924 he and his family emigrated to South Africa, where he became minister of the Congregational Church in Musgrave Road, Durban. Here he exercised a notable ministry lasting thirty-two years. In the story of Congregationalism in Southern Africa *The Harvest and the Hope* copious references are made to Mr Taylor. Here one reads that he was scholarly, devout, gracious and good and influenced the lives of many. His preaching was rarely dramatic, but in almost every sermon he plumbed the depths and scaled the heights, making his hearers aware of the presence and the power of God. He was first chairman of the C.U.S.A. (1945). Harsum Taylor died in 1968 at the age of ninety-two.

BEVAN, John, M.A.

Born in Nottingham in 1877, John Bevan was brought up as a Wesleyan Methodist. He became a local preacher at an early age, but eventually decided on the Congregational ministry and entered New College in 1900. His first pastorate was at Stone, Staffordshire, and in 1911 he accepted the call to Victoria Road. Whilst there, he became a member of Jesus College and took the theological tripos. In 1915 he enlisted as a chaplain in the Forces, but was invalided out the next year. In 1917 he accepted a call to Soho Hill, Birmingham, rejoining the Army in 1918 as a private, but finally entered for a commission in the Inns of Court Regiment. In 1921 he was invited to the church at Balham where he remained twenty-five years, his death occurring suddenly on November 3rd 1946 as he was about to commence his twenty-sixth year as minister. He was sixty-nine.

BALLARD, Frank Hewett, M.A.

Frank Ballard was born at Spencer's Wood in 1886. He trained for the ministry at Paton College and was also a student at Jesus College, Cambridge, where he took his M.A. degree. Ordained to the ministry in 1911, he went to Knutsford and after a most promising early ministry there left to become an army chaplain. In 1917 he resigned his commission and became minister at Victoria Road. He married Miss Isobel Oman, daughter of a former distinguished Principal of Westminster College. From Cambridge, Mr Ballard went to Highbury, Bristol, and later to Hampstead Garden Suburb, where he stayed eighteen years. For the last seven years of his life he was minister at Linton, Cambridgeshire, preaching his last sermon on May 17th 1959. His death came very unexpectedly the next day.

DUNKERLEY, Roderic, B.A., B.D., PH.D.

The son of the famous author, John Oxenham, Roderic was born in London in 1884. He was trained at New College, though he was a life-long student. Having been minister in Colchester for thirteen years he accepted a call to Victoria Road though his pastorate was a short one of six years which ended with his moving to Gloucester in 1928. From there he became Principal of Westhill Training College, Birmingham and later had two further pastorates

at Hockley and Kelvedon. He died in 1966 at the age of eighty-one. He was the author of many books but perhaps the most successful was the Penguin *Beyond the Gospels* which has been reprinted.

BARRADALE, Victor Arnold, M.A.

Victor Barradale was born in 1874 of L.M.S. missionary parents in Tientsin. After the death of his parents he came to England at the age of five to live with his uncle, the Rev. George Sadler, in Derbyshire. He gained a scholarship to Corpus Christi, Oxford, and passed to Mansfield to follow in his father's missionary footsteps. In 1899 he was appointed by the L.M.S. to serve in Samoa but was able to stay only five years because of his wife's health. On returning home, he became minister of Congregational churches, first at Cuckfield, then at Howard Chapel, Bedford. Whilst in Bedford he visited Samoa, in the capacity of chairman of the Southern Committee of the L.M.S., in order to offer sympathy to the churches there after a terrible influenza scourge. In 1925 he became one of the foreign secretaries of the L.M.S., and in 1929 took up the pastorate of Victoria Road where he remained until 1936. Although intending to retire, he willingly took over the temporary pastorate of Royston whilst their own minister was serving as a chaplain in the Army. He died on October 12th 1947 aged seventy-three, leaving two daughters.

ARMSTRONG, Norman, B.A.

Norman Armstrong was born in Leeds in 1897. He was a student at Leeds University and trained for the ministry at Yorks United College. His first pastorate was at West End, Haverhill, after which he moved to Wisbech in 1930. In 1937 he came to Victoria Road, leaving in 1944 to become co-secretary of the Youth Department of the C.U.E.W. His last two pastorates were at Preston and Lancaster; he retired in 1964. He died on October 25th 1975.

BUCKINGHAM, Clifford John, M.A.

John Buckingham, though now retired from the ministry is happily still with us and resides in the county. He was trained for the ministry at Yorks United College and after pastorates at Elland and East Bolden he received the invitation to Victoria Road in 1944. During his last two years he was also secretary of the Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire Congregational Union. In 1952 he was appointed Moderator of the Eastern Province and became the last President of the C.C.E.W. (in 1972) before the formation of the U.R.C. Until his retirement he had been minister at Southwold.

GREEN, John William, M.A., M.ENG.

John Green was born at Staveley, Derby, in 1913. He went to Liverpool University where he qualified in engineering and then proceeded to Cheshunt College for his ministerial training. His first charge was in Stockport (1948-1953) and then he came to Victoria Road where he stayed seven years. Moving to Durham in 1960, he also undertook the secretaryship of the Durham and Northumberland Congregational Union. In 1970 he was called to Malvern where he is still exercising an important ministry.

WRAY, James Lewis, M.A.

Lewis Wray trained at Mansfield College, Oxford and had three pastorates before Victoria Road. These were at Hall Green, Birmingham (1935-1939), Bishops Stortford (1939-1952) and Wembley Park (1952-1961). His ministry at Victoria Road extended over thirteen years. After his retirement, he became Interim Moderator at Duxford.

